

Pigeon River Country State Forest Strengths, Challenges and Opportunity Input February 15, 2008 RAM Center

Strengths

Large Size
Remoteness
Lack of human population
Accessibility
Unique wildlife – elk, bobcat, bear
Management
Quiet
Biological diversity – plant, animal, fish
Recreational diversity
3 unique trout streams
 - many values
Timber
Family friendly
Unique array of forest types = unique wildlife
No cell service
“Big Wild”
Recreational users seen compatible

Challenges

Alleged user conflicts
Maintaining “Big Wild” for future generations
Need to educate users on how to maintain “Big Wild”
Control of recreation activities
Teaching stewardship
Controlling commercial recreational uses
Being sure uses are sustainable
Enforcing the rules
Forest Management
 - harvesting, species abundance, etc.
Users/uses contributing & not contributing to funding management
Distribution of mountain biking and equestrian opp. On PRCSF
Education of all about impacts/tolerance of various activities
Meeting user expectations w/in capability of the land
Expanding population who wants to use forest = pressure on the land
Lack of knowledge about volunteer opportunities
Keeping PRCSF quiet.

Opportunities

Loops of designated equestrian routes besides the Shore to Shore Trail
More MBike loops if the Shingle Mill is closed to MBikes

Focus on uniqueness of PRCSE by providing opportunity for MBike & Equestrian elsewhere

- stay w/ COMgt. recommendations

Follow COMgt. to the letter

- don't be greedy by trying to get too much out of the forest

Follow COMgt. to the letter

- focus on objective of the "Big Wild"

Apply science to pressures/impact Equestrian's bring to bear.

- keep horses on service/ work roads
- maintain cooperative spirit
- Maintain the Big Wild
- Regular (annual) review of situation

ID what we want to accomplish w/ horses & bicycles

- 1973 COMgt. was to spread out horse use, not so now which focuses on concentrating horse use in defined locations/trails only

Think about keeping Shingle Mill & Pickerel L. pathways open to M Bikes.

Be advocates for conservation and multiple use

Look at different ways to limit access and entry.

- Not just close/open a certain trail (e.g. seasonal use only, etc.)

Need to educate equestrian users on where they can & can't ride

- How to enforce?

PRA Board position is to keep Shingle Mill open to MB

- Personal view is do as COMgt. says and close Shingle Mill to MB & follow equestrian recommendations in the COMgt.

Keep Shingle Mill open to MBike

- Use combination of forest roads and seasonal county roads to provide loops of additional/equestrian trail/route that is also open to M Bike

Have strong commitment for all trails open to MBike, equestrian and hiking to sustainability

- May need to close or renovate/rebuild/re-route unsustainable trails.

Keep Shingle Mill open to MBike

- Align bicyclists w/ human powered trails

Need to define enforcement strategy/efforts

Need to improve markings for equestrian trails

- Not just blue
- Need loop horse trail(s)

Use COMgt. as written

Use COMgt. as written with special attention to the 8 objectives on pg. 14

- Not totally exclude snowmobile, equestrian & MBikes

Questions/Comments Related to Opportunities

Don't let enforcement limitations stop a good law or rule

Should we have a strict interpretation of COMgt. or accommodate without the 8 objectives on page 14 being compromised?

- How can we use seasonal restrictions?

What are the user conflicts?

How can MBike & Horse groups help meet the 8 objectives in the COMgt on page 14?

Concern about representation in the future for the range of users

- MMBA has worked well w/ PRCSF management on the Shingle Mill and elsewhere on erosion control, stewardship

Many trail users ride as families, individuals, small groups.

- Sees equestrians as not damaging

- Supports multiple use trails unless there is a conflict

Could every trail event have a stewardship requirement to work on an official defined stewardship project?

Enforcement and policing challenges tend not to be with group members, rather with those who are not affiliated with groups

- Don't let the lack of enforcement personnel influence policy choice

Is it possible to use equestrian group camp for individual/family equestrian camping?

Need more multiple use trails like is done in Alpena Co.

What is more important, the social or NR value of the PRCSF?

Need to regularly track trends in recreational use on the PRCSF

How many miles of MB & Equestrian trails are needed?

Need to keep in mind those with disabilities so they can enjoy the PRCSF

Final Thoughts/Questions

Need accurate information on the amount of work roads, unauthorized roads, unauthorized trails to go along with knowledge of miles of county and forest road and designated trails

How does one volunteer to help with projects that may be expensive?

What is the level of management/enforcement available?

- FMFM has 1 acting forest manager, 1 forester, 1 forest tech and 1 equipment operator (lacking seasonal employees related to recreation due to budget cuts for FMFM)
- WLD has approximately 1/4 of a biologist, 1/4 of a wildlife tech
- Law Enforcement has approximately 1/4 of a CO in Otsego County and 1/4 + 1/4 of a CO in Cheboygan County and 1/4 + 1/4 of a CO in Montmorency County
- Fish has 1/4 of a biologist and 1/4 of a fisheries tech

Estimated there are the following in the PRCSF:

- Hundreds of miles (up to 300) of undesignated trails
- 100- 300 miles of work roads
- 170 miles of county road
- 54 miles of High Country and Shingle Mill Pathway
- 37 miles of Shore to Shore Trail
- 115 miles of forest roads

Reminder that under 2007 COMgt.:

- horses are confined to county and forest roads and the Shore to Shore Trail with camping only at Johnson's Crossing and Elk Hill
- MBikes confined to High Country Pathway, county and forest roads

Pigeon River Country State Forest Equestrian/Mountain Bike Work Group
February 29, 2008 Meeting Notes
RAM Center
Roscommon, MI

Meeting started at 2PM. After introductions, Deputy Director Mindy Koch reiterated charge to group. Goal was to provide recommendations to DNR Director Humphries in regards to drafting land use rules implementing Concept of Management related to mountain biking and equestrian use in the PRCFS. The goal is to have those rules ready for information at the April NRC meeting and action at the May NRC meeting.

Facilitator Chuck Nelson outlined approach:

1. List suggestions to consider regarding mountain biking and equestrian use related to the COMgt.
2. Evaluate each suggestion with all getting a say
3. Any additional suggestions
4. Provide an opportunity for public input
5. Final comments by the work group

Overall Suggestions to Consider

A year's grace before implementation of COMgt.

Keep equestrian system as it was w/ a reservation system

No change in COMgt.

Allow MBike on Shingle Mill Pathway as before

Allow MBike on Shingle Mill, Pickerel L. & Mgt. Roads

A Year's Grace from Implementation

Not a problem

Support – how to do it

What additional work will take place?

Not in favor

Need a specific objective

Not in favor

Not in favor

What are the specific objectives of such a delay?

What are opportunities to relieve the pressure is the concern

Instead try the COMgt. for a year and see how that works (8)

Need a clear map that shows what uses can be where per the COMgt.

Support w/ study of problems (actual/potential) w/ equestrian use (2)

Keep the equestrian system as it was w/ a reservation system

Not in favor

Not in favor (keep to COMgt.)

Concern about need to block off “commercial” people that are bringing in people to see elk.

Sees a financial potential from equestrian system

Benefit DNR and local economy

Interested in using internet for reservations for equestrians

Concern about protection of Game & Fish Fund

Have equestrians use existing designated trails/campsites

Stick with COMgt. (2)

Problem with equestrians may be overuse

Cutting 15 dispersed camps will reduce use

Support reservation/registration system to camp for equestrians

Increase trail mileage by opening mgt. roads & other “2-tracks”

Concern about Sept./Oct. use conflicts w/ equestrians and other forest users

LeGrande/Stony Creek may be a better place for equestrian camping and elk viewing

Some concern about neighborhood

Stick w/ COMgt.

Pigeon River CSF is special and it is not a park

Don't open mgt. roads to horses

According to COMgt. mgt. roads may be part of non-vehicular recreation system.

Consider camping for equestrians at other than Elk Hill

Elk Hill is overused & stopping dispersed camping at the 15 sites will further concentrate use at Elk Hill.

Wants 8 of 15 dispersed equestrian camping sites left open

Lack of self-reg. of equestrian use by equestrians.

Keep the PRCSF the Big Wild

Where will those displaced equestrians go if 15 camps closed?

Need to develop alternatives

Follow COMgt.

May be able to use some mgt. roads to create additional equestrian trails linking county, forest and management roads

No Change in COMgt.

Agree with this with the exception of need to allow MBike use .

No need to revise to accommodate equestrian use.

Agree with the exception of allowing MBike use on the Shingle Mill and Pickerel Lake pathways

Don't agree

Need study on equestrian impacts.

Agree w/ no exception

Agree with exception of allowing MBike on Shingle Mill and Pickerel Lake pathways

Agree with no change

Don't agree

Need study of equestrian impacts with one year's grace and allow bikes on the Shingle Mill and Pickerel Lake pathways

Agree with no change

Agree with no change

Agree with no change

However, support that DNR Director can add trails as needed (e.g. Shingle Mill and Pickerel Lake for bikes) (3)

Don't agree

Open Shingle Mill and Pickerel Lake pathways as well as mgt. roads for bikes

Study & not immediately implement equestrian closures to better understand impacts to and from equestrians

Evaluate other places outside but nearby PRCSF for equestrian use

Agree, implement COMgt.

**Allow MBiking on the Shingle Mill and Pickerel Lake Pathways and Mgt. Roads
(also cover just allowing MBiking on Shingle Mill only)**

Able to get around due to healthy condition

Has not seen conflict related to Mbike use

Shingle Mill Pathway biking is long term use not a problem

Pickerel Lake is short, family oriented loop trail that is not a problem

Mgt. roads are signed foot traffic only, support that

Disagree as mgt. roads are closed to motor vehicular traffic, not bikes or horses

Believe Mbike use is relatively static since the mid-90s after a quick rise in the late 1980s

This is first COMgt. that was written to address new uses such as MBike

Mgt. roads for mgt. only

Each is an intrusion on Big Wild

Support maintaining biking loop of the Shingle Mill

Tends to be one-way traffic, which promotes safety

Doesn't see significant negative impact on wildlife from biking on the Shingle Mill &

Pickerel Lake pathways, has concerns about potential of such impact from biking on mgt. roads

Doesn't see negative impact from MBike on either pathway or on mgt. roads

Sees economic benefit from MBike use

Concern about mgt. road uses (2)

MMBA ambiguous about mgt. roads

Key need for biking are the Shingle Mill & Pickerel Lake pathways

Could support Shingle Mill and Pickerel Lake pathways for biking, not mgt. Roads

Mgt. roads should be walk- in only

OK with biking on all 3 venues

Not supportive of any open to biking

Biking only on the Shingle Mill pathway, not the other venues

Other Suggestions

Keep trails as they are with no improvements to increase speed on pathways open to biking

Keep Elk Hill only for equestrians

Concern concentrating horse use will increase negative impacts on forest

Need a reservation system for equestrian camping

Concern about large equestrian group use, especially commercial use

Keep PRCAC involved in decisions (e.g. Land Use Orders)

Pass

Pass

Should have to register to use equestrian camps by computer/internet

Need accurate data

Pass

Explore opportunities to provide equestrian opportunities near PRCSF but set ground rules to limit impact

Pass

Keep equestrian system as it is with reservations for all equestrian campers

Need representation on PRCAC for currently non-represented groups (eg. biking)

Need representation for equestrians on PRCAC

Are limitations on equestrian use necessary for all year or just during September and October?

Look at area and better determine where use is and where it could or should be

Need to design a study around the situation.

Need special attention to re-opening Johnson's Crossing to fit within the COMgt.

Need to study equestrian impacts

Need to be prepared for extra enforcement regarding restrictions on equestrian use

Public Input

Concern that Elk Hill will be busier if dispersed camps are closed.

Wants an alternative to current equestrian system, suggests moving it to the East

Feels the few hunter conflicts with equestrians are around Elk Hill and knows of none elsewhere

Need to document use of PRCSF

Need to help people to connect with the outdoors in many ways or we will lose support for conservation

If bike & horse use does not have a negative impact on hunting or fishing, it shouldn't be banned

Road closures were related to reducing elk poaching and the lack of need for additional roads after oil and gas industry was in place

Sees the danger in riding horses on the county and forest road system from vehicles

Has ridden horses in the PRCSF since 1970s as well as hiked

Rules for equestrian use didn't start until outfitters started cross country travel

Final Comments

Resource Stewards want all equestrian camping to be outside of PRCSF

Why is off-site equestrian camping being closed (asked of Dep. Director Koch)?

Deputy Director Koch responded that:

- It will reduce equestrian use

- Goal is to protect purpose/integrity/access to Game and Fish Protection Fund
and the federal Pittman-Robertson fund

- Not a bright line issue

 - FWS provides oversight

 - Forest uses need to be compatible with hunting & fishing

 - FWS sees as mountain biking and equestrian use as generally
incompatible with hunting and fishing

Meeting adjourned at 5PM

Notes submitted by Dr. Chuck Nelson, Facilitator